

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS,  
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The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Room 3E880  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The purpose of this correspondence is to provide you with my observations concerning a recent fact finding visit to Iraq. The main purpose of my visit was to observe the elections and while there I also examined reconstruction efforts, the security situation, and training of Iraqi security forces.

Over a period of 21 months, I have been to Iraq seven times. During my first visit to Umm Qassar in April 2003 I had a conversation with Mr. Mohammed Abdul Hassan. Mr. Hassan said to me, "Like in your country now I will get to choose my own leader." That day has come for Mr. Hassan and millions of other Iraqis.

On election day, I visited two polling stations. In a suburb of Irbil, at the Ainhawa polling station number 212004, I witnessed hundreds of Iraqis voting. One could sense the Iraqis were celebrating this historic moment. In the United States our citizens vote and leave the polling station. The Iraqis did not leave, staying within the grounds proudly displaying their purple-ink-stained index fingers, proof they cast their ballot in thier historic election.

At a Baghdad polling station in the international zone I met with representatives of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq. The chief electoral officer, Mr. Adil Al Lami predicted voter turnout would be very high. I was doubtful, but he was correct. Iraqis demonstrated they would walk over body parts of suicide bombers to vote.

President Ghazi Yawar told me the losers in this election are the terrorists, and those who are invited but do not participate in Iraq's new democratic process. Yes, many Iraqis are experiencing democracy, and we should be grateful the majority rejected terrorist demands, but we should not fool ourselves into believing our work in Iraq is coming to an end.

While there are many issues to resolve, I believe three basic concerns remain: first, Iraq's main groups, the Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, will continue to have differences and it will be extremely difficult to develop an acceptable constitution and build a stable government; second, not only is the Iraqi infrastructure in

shambles, their economy is in worse shape than some third world nations; and finally while the insurgent/terrorist threats may have been curtailed because of increased precautions for the elections, we can expect the intensity of the attacks to remain at pre election levels until a compromise is reached between the new government and the insurgent leadership.

I believe encouraging the newly appointed prime minister and other Iraqi officials to reach out to all groups would be extremely useful. This will be especially important during the next phase of Iraq's democratic process—the development and ratification of a constitution. If other ethnic groups are not included in development of a constitution, Iraq's cycle of violence will continue hampering sustained progress. There may be situations where some Iraqi groups refuse to participate in the process, no matter how much effort is made to reach out to them. If this becomes the case, the Iraqi government should consider legislation against these tribal and religious leaders banning them from participating in the political process altogether.

President Yawar told me Ambassador L. Paul Bremer's attempt to change Iraq from a state run economy to a private one was a mistake. Iraqis were not ready for this change. Iraqis have always been dependent on state-run companies and the government for many services. This dependence on the government stifles individual initiative. I believe in order to help rebuild Iraqi initiative we must allow Iraqis to do for themselves and succeed or fail on their own. Excluding the elections, the United States has continued to do many things for the Iraqis placing advisors at every level of the Iraqi government. As we consider drawing down the number of Coalition military forces, we should also consider drawing down the number of civilian advisors we have imbedded in Iraqi government agencies. This should allow Iraqis to accomplish things on their own and gain the needed confidence to govern themselves.

The security situation in Iraq remains fragile. We all understand there are pockets of stability, but the focus of our attention is elsewhere, in the areas around Mosul,

Al Anbar Province, parts of Baghdad, and the area immediately South of Baghdad. General Casey informed me Iraqis took the initiative and secured the polling stations, and while the insurgents and terrorists mounted their best force against this security, the terrorists failed. Hopefully we can build on this success and use election security as a model for the future.

I believe General Petraeus is doing his best to get the number of Iraqi security forces trained and equipped as quickly as possible. What I do not sense is that there is a plan for transitioning security from Coalition forces to Iraqi forces. There is not a metric established which would help determine when Iraqi security force battalions are capable of accepting responsibility for the security of their sectors. I am not advocating a timeline for withdrawal of Coalition forces, but rather a reasonable set of conditions that Iraqi forces can attain and demonstrate competence. And rather than keep the world in the dark about Iraqi security forces, I recommend we publicize their progress, and of course, if needed, their lack of progress.

My experiences in Iraq have provided me a crucial understanding of the challenges the Coalition faces and a perspective on what it will take to bring stability and progress to this long-oppressed nation. I would be happy to meet with you to discuss these observations. If you have any questions you may contact Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino, at 202-225-2548, who has accompanied me on all of my trips to Iraq.

Sincerely,

Christopher Shays  
Chairman